

14. Eugene Lafayette, died single on July 7, 1929.

James Washington Mathis was a farmer and a cabinet maker. His customers would pay him in potatoes and skins of animals. The Indians would give him buckskins in trade. He was also a born orator and was paid to make speeches for less gifted men running for office. To make extra money he would make shingles out of cypress trees. This would necessitate hunting for the right kind of tree which usually grew in a swamp. When he found one he would take his wife and children with him, as it would take several months to complete the job. Instead of living in the covered wagon, James would build a palmetto shanty, with only one opening which served as the door.

One night he wanted to go hunting, so he built a fire not too far from the door to discourage animals from snooping around. It did not work, however, as a bear came lumbering along. Of course, the dogs did not like his intrusion, so the battle began. In their fight, the fire was extinguished. The bear was winning and the dogs were pushed back into the open door. His wife had the gun ready but the bear decided it was not worth the fight and left. The oldest daughter, Etta, had to rebuild the fire while her mother watched with gun ready in the event the bear decided to return.

For the children's pleasure, James built a boat which they named "Dido". One night James thought he heard a woman screaming across the river. He boarded the boat and rowed across but just before he set foot on the other side, he realized it was a panther instead of a woman.

One other night Mr. Mathis was hunting on horse back when some kind of animal sprang on the back of the horse, just behind him. The horse in his panic dislodged the animal. Needless to say the horse and rider never stopped until they reached home and safety.

James had a fairly good education for those pioneer days. He had attended an academy in Augusta, Georgia when a young man. He learned to make violins and made one for himself. After coming to Florida, he also served as a dentist for the pioneers, and treated the Indians when they were sick.

When James' son, George Riley Mathis was about ten years old he fell out of a window and a rough piece of rock gut a gash in his stomach several inches long. His insides were protruding. James washed them and put them back into the stomach and sewed up the opening with a needle and thread. He went to a pine tree which had been gashed and took some of the sap from the cut area. James made a plaster of it and used it to cover the wound. It stayed on the wound until it dried up and flaked off. All this was done without the help of anesthetic, not even an aspirin. George recovered and lived to be an old man.

James W. Mathis died from pneumonia while on a hunting trip in north Florida on October 15, 1893. He was buried at Center Hill, Florida. Sally later married Washington Morgan. She died in Tampa on Feb. 1, 1946 and was buried in the Fort Ogden Cemetery in DeSoto County.

REFERENCES: Pioneers of Wiregrass Georgia by Folks Huxford: Vol. 4, page 192; Vol. 1, page 192; Vol. 6, page 326. 1850 Columbia Co., Fla. Census, 1860 & 1885 Manatee Co., Fla. census. Pension papers of Edward Whidden and Mrs. Mary Ann Williams Mathis Whidden. Marriage records of Manatee County. Florida Peninsular, microfilm copy of this old newspaper at Polk County Historical Library, Bartow. CSA service papers of J. W. Mathis, National Archives. Marriage records of DeSoto County. Ft. Ogden & Joshua Creek Cemeteries. Special thanks to Miss Varnie Sloan, 220 Beach Place, Tampa who is